

VITALY BIANKI

THE FIRST HUNT





Puppy was sick and tired of chasing chickens around the yard.

"I'm going to track down wild birds and beasts," he decided.

So he wriggled under the gate and ran toward the meadow.

As he ran, wild beasts and birds and insects saw him. And each began to think to himself.

"I'll trick him!" thought Bittern Bird.

"I'll surprise him!" thought Hoopoe Bird.

"I'll give him a fright!" thought Wryneck Bird.

"I'll give him the slip!" thought Lizard.

The caterpillars, the butterflies, and the grasshoppers all thought:

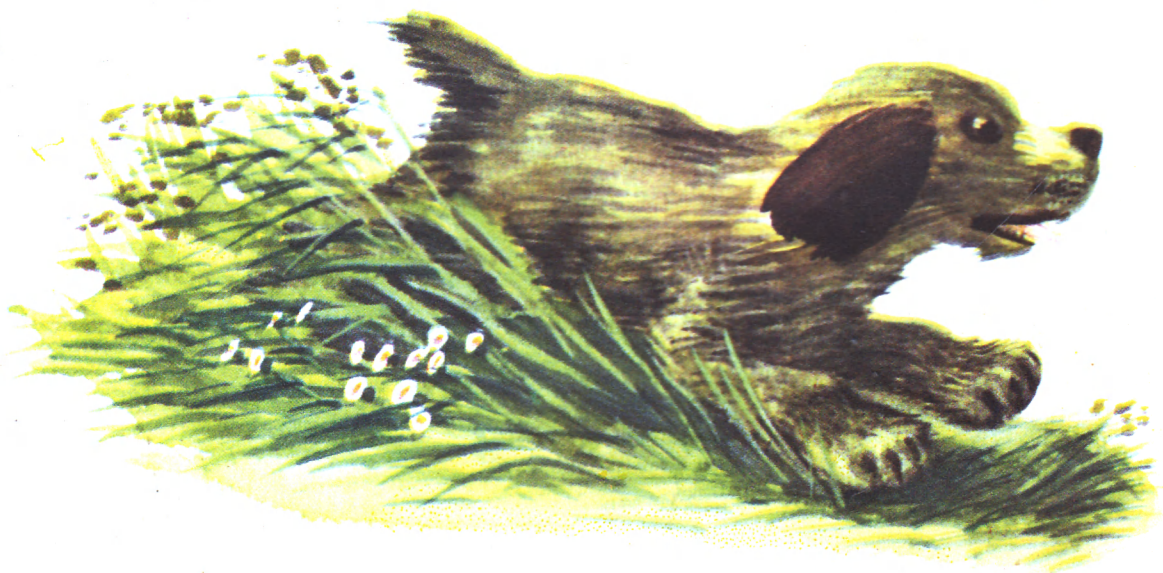
"We'll hide from him!"

"And I shall drive him away!" thought Bombardier Beetle.

"We can all stand up for ourselves, each in his own way!" they all thought to themselves.

Meanwhile Puppy had run up to the pond and spied Bittern, standing by the reeds on one leg.

The water reached to his knee.



“O-ho!” thought Puppy, “I’ll catch him right now.”
He poised himself to spring onto his back. But Bittern
glanced at him and strode into the reeds. The wind
whipped about the pond. The reeds bent and swayed

back and forth
back and forth.

Brown and yellow stripes swayed before Puppy’s
eyes

back and forth
back and forth.



Bittern stood in the reeds, all painted in yellow and
brown stripes. He stood and he swayed

back and forth
back and forth.

Puppy opened his eyes wide and stared and stared,
but he could not spot Bittern in the reeds.

“Huh,” he thought, “Bittern has tricked me. I’m not
about to jump into an empty patch of reeds! I’ll just catch
myself another kind of bird.”





He ran over to a hillock and gazed about.

There sitting on the ground was Hoopoe.

The bird was playing with his topknot, now opening it wide, now closing it tight.

“Aha!” thought Puppy, “I’ll pounce on him from this hillock right now!”

But Hoopoe fell to the ground, spread his wings, fanned out his tail, and raised his beak in the air.

Puppy stared.

There was no bird at all, only a coloured rag from which a crooked needle protruded.

Puppy marvelled.

What had become of Hoopoe?

“Did I take this coloured rag for a bird?

I’ll hurry off and catch a small bird!”





He dashed over to a tree and sure enough, a small bird was perched on a branch, Wryneck.

Puppy rushed at him, but Wryneck scuttled into a hollow in the tree.

“Oho!” thought Puppy. “I have him now!”

He stood up on his hind legs and peeked into the hollow.

There in the black hole a black snake writhed and hissed terribly.

Puppy leaped back.

His fur stood on end and he took to his heels.

Wryneck hissed at him from the hollow.

He twisted his head right and left, and all along his back, like a snake, coiled a stripe of black feathers.

“Woof! What a fright! I’ve had a narrow escape! I’m not going to hunt birds anymore. I’d do better to catch a lizard.”

Lizard sat on a rock, eyes closed, warming himself in the sun.





Quietly Puppy crept toward him—then leaped—and grabbed him by the tail.

Lizard jerked away, leaving his tail in Puppy's clenched teeth, and crawled under the rock.

The tail wriggled between Puppy's teeth.

Puppy snorted, dropped the tail, and made for Lizard.

But it was too late.

He was sitting peacefully under the rock, growing himself a new tail.

"Well," thought Puppy, "if lizard has given me the slip, I'll just catch some insects."

He looked around.

Beetles ran along the ground. In the grass the grasshoppers jumped. Along branches caterpillars crawled, and in the air flew butterflies.

Puppy took off after them, but all of a sudden everything about him changed.



It was quite a puzzle: all were right there, but he couldn't see them. Everyone was hiding.

Green grasshoppers hid in the grass.

Caterpillars stretched themselves along branches and lay very still.





You could not tell them from the twigs of the tree.
Butterflies alighted on trees, closing their wings.
There was no way to tell which was the bark, which the
leaves, and which the butterflies.

Only tiny Bombardier Beetle crawled along the ground and did not hide.

Puppy chased after him.

He wanted to grab him, but Bombardier Beetle stopped short and fired a quick sharp stream at the pup.

It got right into his nose!

Puppy yelped and jumped back; tail between his legs, he ran over the meadow and under the gate.

He hid in the kennel and was afraid even to poke his nose out the door for a long, long time.

And the beasts and the birds and the insects once again went about their business, each in his own way.

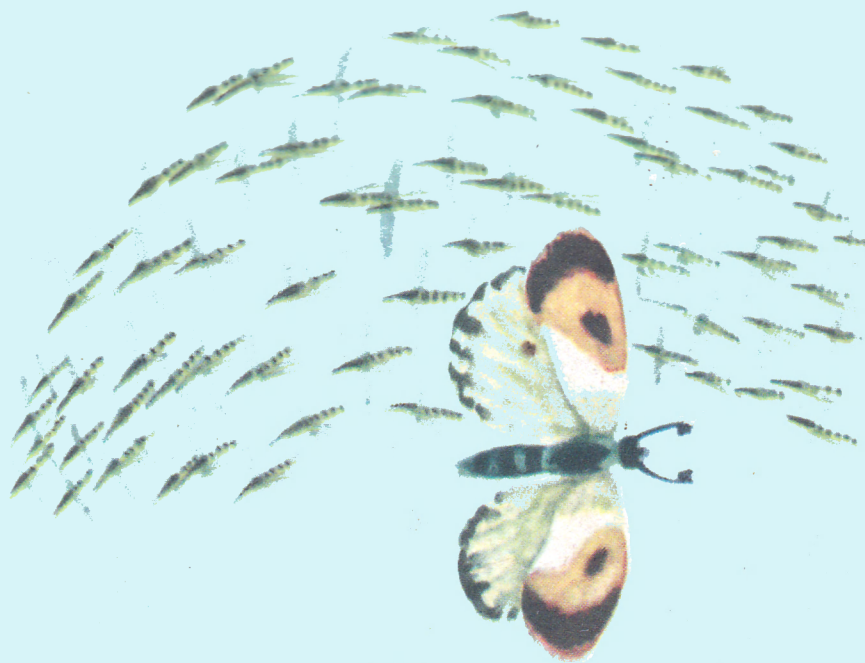




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PROGRESS PUBLISHERS

Moscow

В. БИАНКИ

ПЕРВАЯ ОХОТА

на английском языке

English Translation © Progress Publishers 1978

Перевод сделан по книге:
В. Бианки. Первая охота
М., Издательство «Детская литература», 1972